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DESCRIPTION: The former concrete enclosures of the polar and the brown bear were completely rebuilt to comply with new Belgian legislation. Because of the limited space available in the zoo, spectacled bears were chosen for the new exhibit. To meet the Belgium legislation the enclosure should have a minimum size of 2 times 400m². It was necessary to fill the former enclosure with as much useable surface as possible. Therefore the two previous bear enclosures were enlarged, interconnected and the moat was drained. The new enclosure meets the EAZA ursid husbandry guidelines (1998). The wall barrier around the enclosure is 2.80 meters high including a 1 meter glass parapet. To provide extra safety, electric wires are placed on a height of 1.75 meters along the inside of the enclosure.

SIZE: The bears and coatimundis have access to an outside enclosure of 1172m², which can be divided into two enclosures of 603m² and 569m². When separated, the male bear has access to three linked inside enclosures (total of 40m²), the coatimundis to two linked inside enclosures (total of 22m²) and the female bear to four linked inside enclosures (total of 52m²).

PLANTS: The vegetation should contribute to a representation of the natural habitat of the spectacled bear. Thick branches and tree nests are provided as resting spots. Dense and plentiful vegetation makes it possible for these mostly solitary animals to get out of each other's sight. Another important aspect of the design is that most plant species are evergreen.

FEATURES DEDICATED TO ANIMALS: Climbing structures and natural vegetation are important features for the bears. The enclosure provides multiple nest sites and building materials. These are dispersed throughout the enclosure so the bears can maintain a distance from one another. Dense and plentiful vegetation makes it possible for the animals to get out of each other's sight. Depending on the bears' social interactions, the two outside enclosures can be linked or divided by using the fence located under the bridge in the middle. The coatimundis can enter their inside enclosures through small holes in the wall, through which the bears cannot fit. The inside enclosures are divided into three sections. The denning area is situated in an undisturbed part of the building that is least frequented by keepers and in a maximum distance

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to the male bear. Two of the four inside enclosures contain a cubbing box, so the female is able to choose. One of the enclosures contains a wooden platform and climbing structures, so cubs can improve their climbing skills.

FEATURES DEDICATED TO KEEPERS: For keeper safety, the zoo keepers have to walk alongside and check the inside enclosures before entering the outside enclosure. The inside enclosure is divided by barred fences. If the bear is in its inside enclosure, the sliding gate is pulled down, so the animal cannot enter the outside enclosure. The sliding gates are controlled by metal handles, marked with numbers and colors, matching the gates.

FEATURES DEDICATED TO VISITORS: The wall barrier around the enclosure is 2.80 meters high including a 1 meter glass parapet. To provide extra safety, electric wires are placed on a height of 1.75 meters along the inside of the enclosure. There is a hammock providing a nesting area in sight of the visitors.

INTERPRETATION: A large 'comic' tells the story about the daily life of a coatimundi and the night life of an Andean bear. Skulls are displayed in a glass cabinet to show the evolution of bear species. The labels explain their jaw differences and how these relate to feeding habits.

MANAGEMENT: Food is scattered in the enclosure to encourage foraging behavior. A weekly enrichment schedule is drawn up for variety.

RESEARCH: The Centre for Research and Conservation (CRC) of the Royal Zoological Society of Antwerp, is coordinating a project, in collaborating with other organizations, that studies the population genetics of the spectacled bear in the southern Andes. Basic knowledge of distribution and population structure can be taken into account in conservation action plans. The research on the population demographics and genetics of the Andean bears is indicated as a priority for the conservation of this species by the EEP and the IUCN Bear Specialist group.

CONSERVATION: The Andean bears are the subject of a European Endangered Species programme.